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### Additional support needs policy in Scotland

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# **Additional support needs policy in Scotland: Challenging or reinforcing social inequality?**

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## **Additional support needs policy in Scotland: Challenging or reinforcing social inequality?**

This paper focuses on Scottish policy on additional support needs and its material outcomes. The central question addressed is the extent to which the Scottish additional support needs system undermines or reinforces existing social and economic inequalities. Administrative data highlight the inflation of the additional support needs category, particularly in relation to non-normative sub-categories such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which are strongly associated with social deprivation. Strategies in navigating the additional support needs system by families from different social class backgrounds are illustrated through short vignettes. The paper concludes with a discussion of the way in which sociological theory may help us to understand recent developments in Scottish additional support needs policy and practice. It is argued that the expansion of the umbrella category of additional support needs has been accompanied by an intensification of its association with social class, particularly in relation to categories which carry high levels of social stigma.

Keywords: Additional support needs, social class, categorisation

### **Introduction**

In the context of the referendum on Scottish independence, which took place in September 2014, there has been an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Scotland's social, cultural and political traditions. For example, the White Paper on Scottish independence (Scottish Government, 2013) highlighted the absence of tuition fees for students living in Scotland as an example of the differences between the English and Scottish education systems, with the former driven increasingly by the market and the latter informed by principles of social justice. Although the White Paper had much less to say about school education, an underpinning assumption was that the Scottish comprehensive school system was inherently more socially inclusive than the heterogeneous English school systems. Despite this emphasis on difference, it appears that the Scottish and English

systems produce very similar levels of social inequality in terms of educational outcomes (Wyness, 2013; Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014). This paper focuses on Scottish policy on additional support needs, which, at least in theory, reflects the redistributive premise that some children require additional provision in order to flourish, and that need rather than merit or background should be the basis of resource allocation. The central question addressed is the extent to which the Scottish additional support needs system undermines or reinforces existing social and economic inequalities. The paper also considers the changes which might be needed in order to make the system more socially redistributive.

The paper begins with an overview of the sociological literature on special and additional support needs in relation to the reproduction of social inequalities. Following an overview of recent developments within Scottish additional support needs policy, we then provide an analysis of administrative data, highlighting the recent expansion in the proportion of children identified as having additional support needs, particularly in some non-normative categories such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Finally, we present three vignettes of parents from different social class backgrounds to illustrate the way in which social location shapes the way in which families navigate the additional support needs system. The paper concludes with a discussion of the way in which sociological theory may help us to understand recent developments in Scottish additional support needs policy and practice.

### **Social justice and additional support needs**

Over the past half century, social theorists have disputed the relative emphasis which should be placed on the eradication of cultural and economic injustices in order to create a more socially just society (for example, Fraser, 1997; Sen, 1985; Young, 1990;

Honneth, 1995). During the 1980s and 1990s, the 'cultural turn' in sociology saw greater emphasis placed on social identity as a major source of inequality, although the continued relevance of social class analysis was maintained by some political theorists (Fraser, 1997; Phillips, 2004). Since the global economic crash of 2007, there has been a resurgence in analysis of economic inequality, with social class resuming centre stage. For example, in the UK, Hills et al. (2010; 2015) used survey and administrative data to analyse the intersection of social class with protected equality characteristics in areas associated with the distribution of income and wealth such as education and employment. Recognising the link between economic turbulence and the rise of the right across the developed world, Standing (2011) suggested that a new social class was in the process of formation, which he termed the precariat. Different social groups were likely to fall into the precariat, including immigrants, young educated people without work, members of the old industrial working class and disabled people. Overall, there is a renewed interest in social class and its intersection with a range of other social variables such as disability.

The field of special educational needs has tended to be dominated by psychological rather than sociological analysis, with a focus on the identification of individual differences and deficits, rather than the impact of social structures. Tomlinson (1985) was one of the first sociologists to theorise the relationship between the growth of the special education system and changes within the youth labour market. In the wake of the 1978 oil crisis, which saw a rapid rise in youth unemployment across the developed world, she argued that the identification of previously undiscovered special educational needs amongst swathes of working class young men served as a device to justify their exclusion from the labour market. What was in reality a failure of the demand side of the labour market (lack of jobs) became rebranded as a failure of the

supply side (lack of appropriate skills and attitudes, which could be remedied by further training). Following the 2007 economic crisis, Tomlinson suggests that young people with low educational qualifications across the developed world are once again held responsible for their economic exclusion (Tomlinson, 2013). She argues that efforts need to be focussed on remedying labour market failures rather than on the identification of a growing population of children and young people with special needs, drawn disproportionately from marginalised social groups (Armstrong, 2005; Dyson & Kozleski, 2008). Research on education in socially disadvantaged areas has also suggested that additional resources should be used to address systemic inequalities, since most learning difficulties are a consequence of poverty rather than inherent physiological or neurological impairments. Better indicators are therefore required to capture the impact of children's material circumstances on their educational development, rather than focusing exclusively on the identification of individual special needs (Lupton & Thrupp, 2013; Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick, & West, 2012).

### **Research methods**

This paper uses a range of data on additional support needs policy and social inequality drawn from two projects. The first project, funded by the ESRC (RES-062-23-0803) between 2007 and 2009, focussed on alternative dispute resolution in the field of additional support needs (Scotland) and special educational needs (England). The project used a mixed methods approach comprising: (i) analysis of policy documents and administrative data; (ii) key informant interviews; (iii) surveys of local authority respondents and parents of children with additional support needs; and (iv) case studies of 49 families in six local authorities. The three case studies of Scottish families presented later in this paper are drawn from this project. Further details of methods are

provided in Riddell and Weedon (2009); Weedon and Riddell (2009); Riddell and Weedon 2009; 2010). The second project, funded by the Leverhulme Foundation (IN-089) between 2012 and 2014, took place in six jurisdictions (England; Scotland; the Netherlands; Sweden; New South Wales, Australia; and California, USA). In the Scottish element of the research, we analysed policy and administrative data and conducted interviews with seven key informants from Scottish Government, local authorities, voluntary organisations and dispute resolution services to interrogate and validate our findings.

### **Social inclusion in Scotland: the gap between rhetoric and reality**

Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, promoting social inclusion has been a major preoccupation of successive administrations. However, Scotland remains a highly unequal society, with social background strongly associated with educational outcomes. Scotland scores highly on PISA tests (OECD, 2007), but is in the middle range of countries with regard to equity. In Canada and Finland (the most equal countries) only 11% of the variance in PISA scores is explained by a pupil's socio-economic status (SES), compared with 18% in Scotland. In other countries, SES exerts an even stronger influence on pupil outcome, accounting for 20% of variance in France, 23% in Belgium, 27% in Hungary and 24% in Belgium. Whilst the attainment gap between pupils in the most and least deprived Scottish neighbourhoods has narrowed slightly over recent years, it continues to be significant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Average tariff score of S4 pupils by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

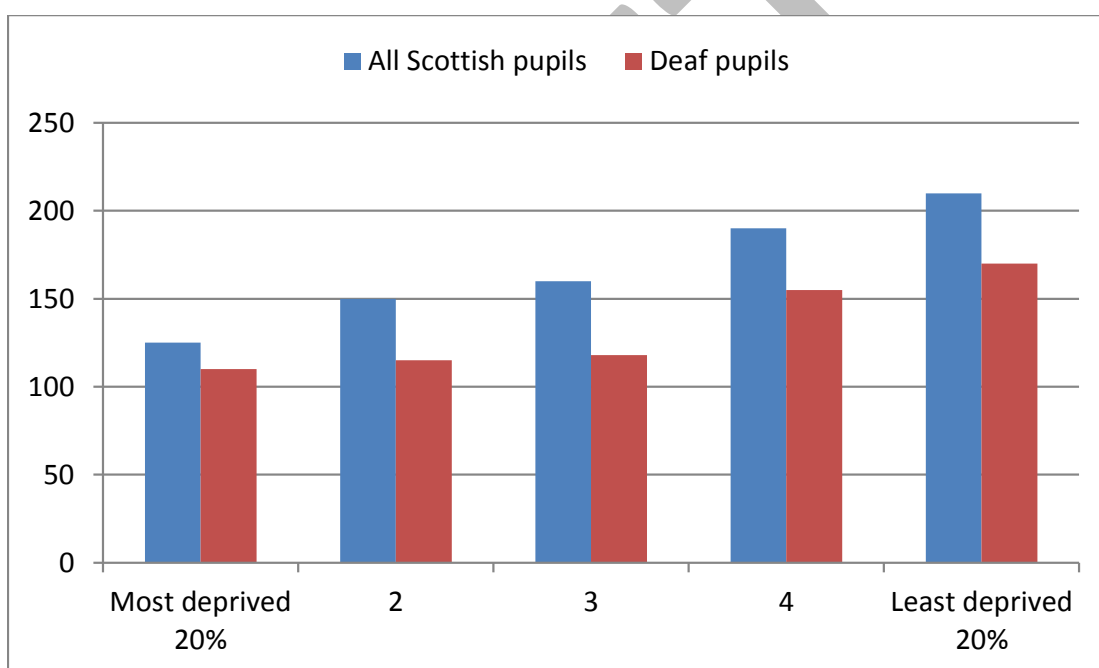
	2005/06 average	2006/07 average	2007/08 average	2008/09 average	2009/10 average	2010/11 average	2011/12 average	2012/13 average
<b>Decile 1 (most deprived)</b>	121	120	121	124	132	135	142	148
<b>Decile 2</b>	136	135	137	143	145	146	151	158
<b>Decile 3</b>	148	146	150	153	154	158	163	167

<b>Decile 4</b>	159	158	162	168	169	169	175	181
<b>Decile 5</b>	170	169	173	179	179	181	183	189
<b>Decile 6</b>	179	180	183	187	191	192	195	199
<b>Decile 7</b>	190	189	193	197	200	197	204	207
<b>Decile 8</b>	199	198	201	205	204	208	209	213
<b>Decile 9</b>	209	217	213	215	215	217	221	224
<b>Decile 10 (least deprived)</b>	223	225	227	230	231	233	236	239

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation of pupil's home address.

Source: Scottish Government, 2014

Figure 1: Mean tariff scores of deaf pupils and general population in S4 by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation



Source: O'Neill, Arendt, & Marschark, 2014

Figure 1 illustrates the pattern of educational inequality experienced by all pupils and those who are deaf, a category of additional support needs which is identified fairly evenly across all social groups. As is the case for the general population, deaf pupils living in the most deprived areas have much lower attainment than those living in more advantaged areas. However, on average their attainment is significantly lower, illustrating the intersection of disability and deprivation. Educational inequalities contribute to the reproduction and amplification of social inequality across generations.



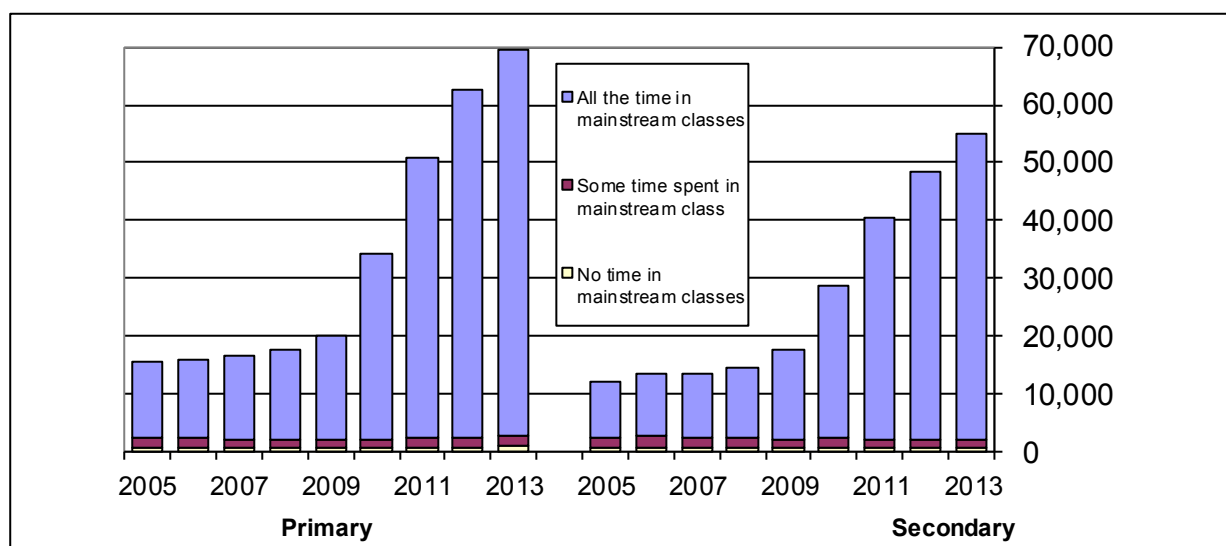
The UK is currently the fourth most unequal country amongst the OECD 34, with the top fifth taking 60% of income, whilst the bottom fifth receives a hundred times less. Over the past 30 years, the share of national income taken by the top 1% has increased from 6% to 14% (Parker, 2013). This intensification of economic inequality has particularly adverse effects on disabled people, including young people with additional support needs (Fordyce et al., 2013; Riddell et al., 2010). As discussed in the section below, over the last decade the identification of additional support needs has expanded, raising questions as to whether the life chances of children identified as having additional needs are enhanced or diminished.

### ***The expansion of the additional support needs population in Scotland***

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 extended the category of additional support needs to include not only children with physical or learning difficulties, but also children whose educational progress was limited by their social circumstances. This all-embracing definition of additional support needs initially appeared to have little impact on rates of identification. From 2005 to 2009, about 5% of the pupil population were counted as having some type of additional support need, with schools instructed to record in the School Census only those pupils with a Record of Needs (RoN), Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) and/or an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP). Since 2009, there has been a year on year increase in the proportion of pupils identified as having some type of additional support need, and 20% of the Scottish pupil population is now counted in this way. As shown in Table 2, there are wide gender differences, with 25% of boys and 15% of girls in Scottish state schools having at least one type of difficulty and therefore falling into the additional support needs category.

Whilst there has been a decrease in the use of statutory plans over this timeframe (see below for further discussion), a plethora of additional support plans have grown up, some of which are nationally recognised and some of which are peculiar to individual local authorities. These include Behaviour Support Plans, Looked After Child's Plans, Individualised Educational Plans, Multi-Agency Support Plans, Additional Support Plans, Young Carer's Plan, More Able Child's Plan and so on. Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, all of these plans are intended to be incorporated into an over-arching Child's Plan. Children with any type of learning difficulty, including temporary health issues such as a broken limb, may be recorded within the annual School Census as having additional support needs. Figure 2, which is published by the Scottish Government and suggests a highly inclusive system, shows that the vast majority of children with additional support needs spend all their time in mainstream classes, with only 1% in separate schools or units. However, no record is kept of the quantity or quality of extra support received which may vary greatly. In some cases, it may be that the child is recorded as having additional support needs, but is not actually in receipt of additional provision.

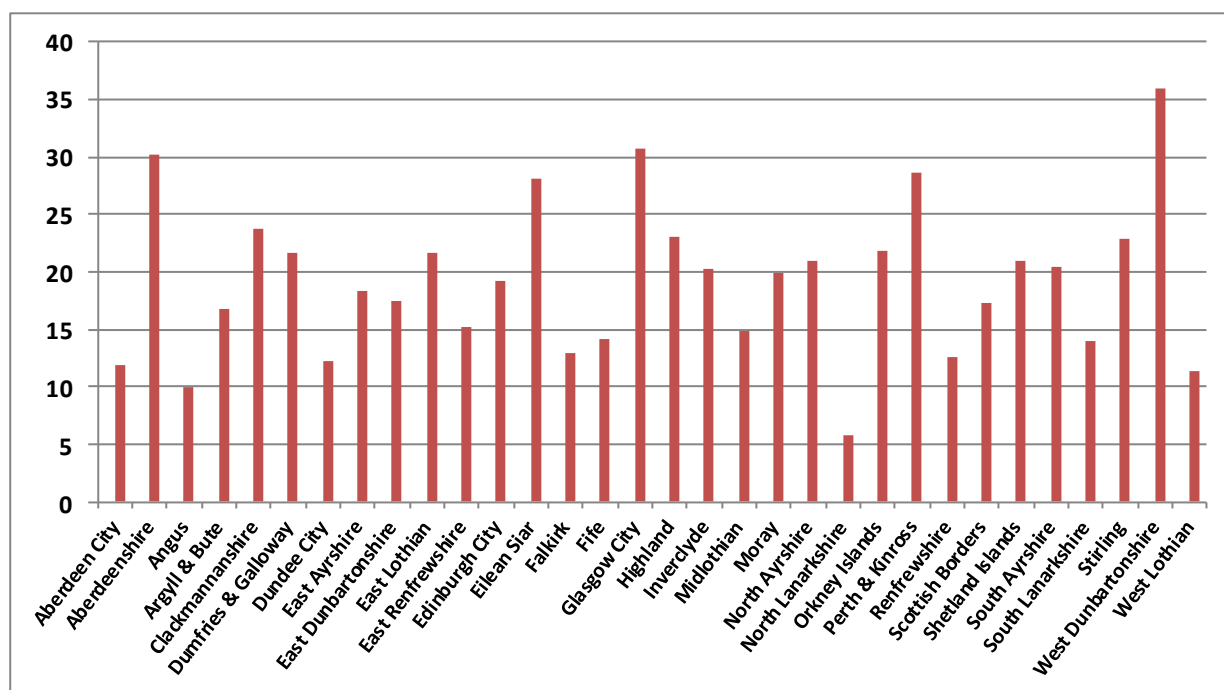
Figure 2: Number of children identified as having additional support needs in Scotland and school placement, 2005–2013



Source: Scottish Government, 2013a

It should also be noted that there are major differences between local authorities in the proportion of children identified as having additional support needs (see Figure 3), ranging from 35% in West Dunbartonshire to 5.4% in North Lanarkshire. Rates of identification do not appear to be linked in any systematic way to area deprivation, so that Aberdeenshire, an affluent rural authority, has one of the highest rates of additional support needs, whereas North Lanarkshire, with high rates of deprivation, has the lowest. Thus variation appears to be an artefact of recording practice, rather than differences in the occurrence of educational and social difficulties.

Figure 3: Percentage of children with additional support needs in each authority as a proportion of the total pupil population, mainstream only, 2013



Source: Scottish Government, 2013a

### *The expansion of particular categories of difficulty*

In addition to the expansion of the number and proportion of pupils recorded as having additional support needs, there has also been a marked growth in the number of categories used, from 12 in 2004 to 24 in 2013. The categories have also become increasingly diverse, including more able pupils, those living in families with substance abuse issues, young carers, those with English as an additional language, pupils who have been bereaved and those whose education has been disrupted.

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 4, some categories of difficulty have expanded more rapidly than others. Until 2006, data were recorded in relation to a pupil's principal learning difficulty and this is still the basis on which statistics are gathered by the Department for Education in England. In 2006, the practice in Scotland changed, so that schools were asked to record all difficulties of each pupil with additional support

needs, not just their main difficulty. This has led to a particularly marked increase in some categories, especially those which are non-normative and likely to be identified alongside others, such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In five years between 2008 and 2013, the proportion of Scottish boys identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties has trebled, increasing from 1.8% in 2008 to nearly 6% in 2013.

Table 2: Reason for support for pupils with Additional Support Needs, by gender, 2008, 2011 and 2013, Rate per 1,000 pupils

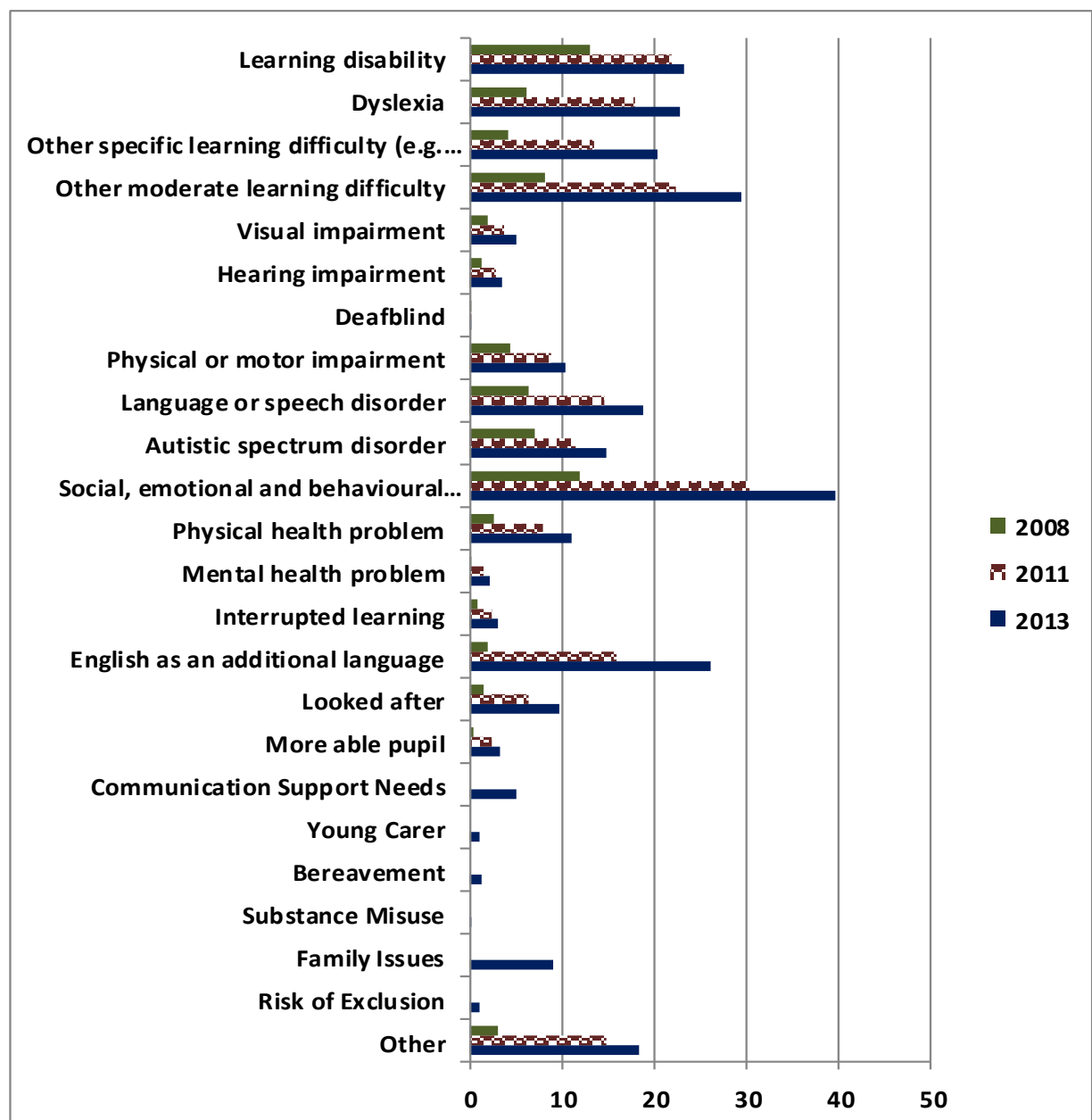
	2008			2011			2013		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
<b>Pupils for whom at least one reason for support is recorded</b>	34.0	76.4	55.5	107.6	183.8	146.4	151.0	237.9	195.3
<b>Learning disability</b>	9.2	17.0	13.2	15.8	27.7	21.9	16.7	29.6	23.3
<b>Dyslexia</b>	3.3	8.9	6.1	12.3	23.5	18.0	16.5	28.9	22.8
<b>Other specific difficulty</b>	2.9	5.6	4.3	10.00	17.0	13.6	15.6	24.9	20.3
<b>Other moderate learning difficulty</b>	5.9	10.6	8.3	17.2	27.3	22.3	23.0	35.7	29.5
<b>Visual impairment</b>	1.6	2.1	1.9	3.3	4.4	3.9	4.3	5.7	5.0
<b>Hearing impairment</b>	1.2	1.6	1.4	2.7	3.2	3.0	3.3	3.9	3.6
<b>Deafblind</b>	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
<b>Physical or motor impairment</b>	3.6	5.2	4.4	6.3	11.5	9.0	7.3	13.5	10.4
<b>Language or speech disorder</b>	4.0	8.9	6.5	9.1	19.9	14.6	11.7	25.8	18.9
<b>Autistic spectrum disorder</b>	1.9	12.4	7.2	3.5	19.5	11.6	4.7	24.5	14.8
<b>Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties</b>	5.0	18.9	12.0	16.4	44.0	30.5	22.2	56.5	39.7
<b>Physical health</b>	2.2	3.1	2.7	7.0	9.0	8.0	10.0	11.9	11.0

	2008			2011			2013		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
<b>problem</b>									
<b>Mental health problem</b>	0.3	0.4	0.3	1.2	2.1	1.6	1.7	2.8	2.3
<b>Interrupted learning</b>	0.6	0.9	0.8	2.1	2.8	2.4	2.5	3.6	3.1
<b>English as an additional language</b>	1.8	2.3	2.0	15.3	16.5	15.9	25.3	26.8	26.1
<b>Looked after</b>	1.4	1.8	1.6	6.0	6.8	6.4	9.4	10.1	9.8
<b>More able pupil</b>	0.4	0.4	0.4	2.5	2.6	2.5	3.2	3.5	3.3
<b>Communication Support Needs</b>							3.0	7.0	5.0
<b>Young Carer</b>							1.4	1.1	1.2
<b>Bereavement</b>							1.3	1.4	1.3
<b>Substance Misuse</b>							0.2	0.3	0.3
<b>Family Issues</b>							8.5	9.5	9.0
<b>Risk of Exclusion</b>							0.4	2.0	1.2
<b>Other</b>	2.2	4.3	3.2	11.5	18.3	15.0	14.3	22.5	18.5

Source: Scottish Government, 2009, 2011c, 2013a

Note: The first row shows the total proportion of pupil who have at least one type of additional support needs recorded. In subsequent rows, pupils with more than one reason for support appear in each row.

Figure 4: Reason for support for pupils with Additional Support Needs, 2008, 2011 and 2013, Rate per 1,000 pupils



Source: Scottish Government, 2009, 2011c and 2013a

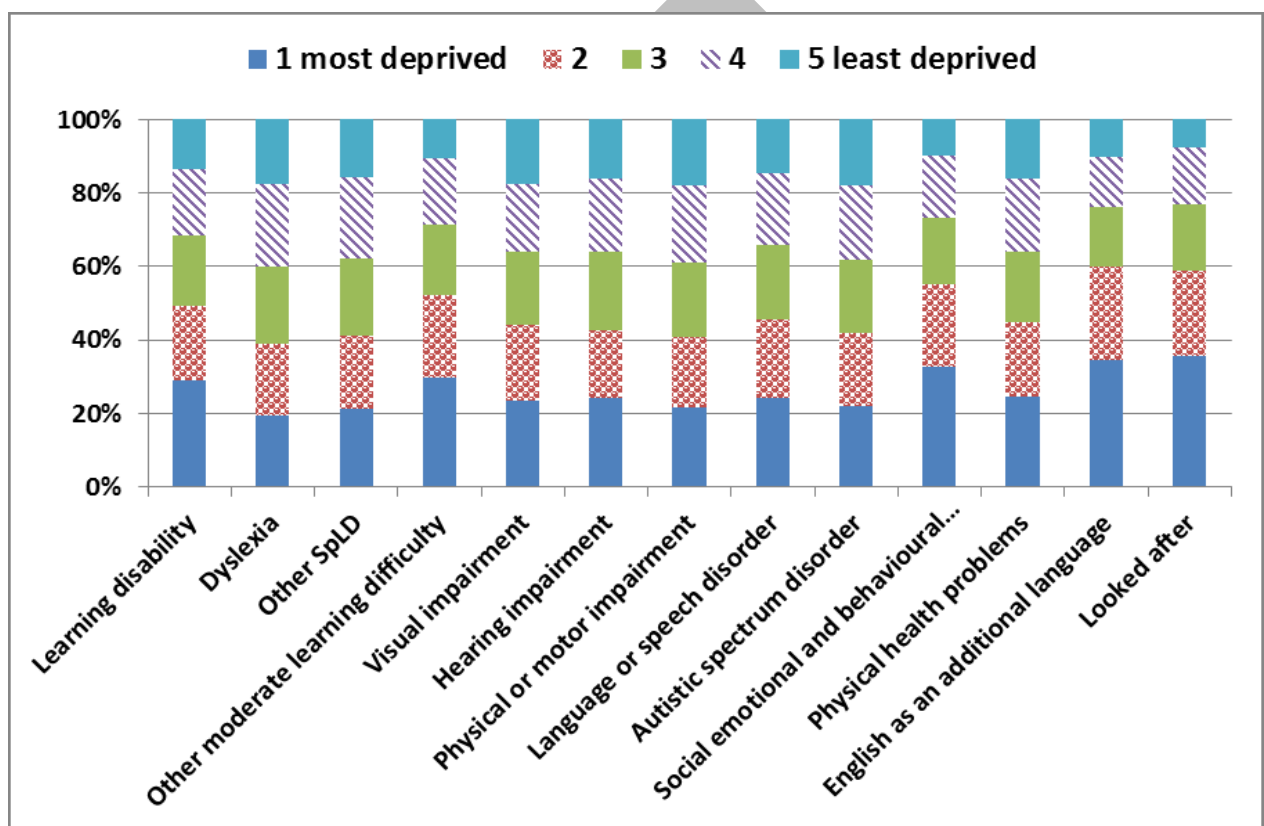
Note: Pupils with more than one reason for support appear in each row.

### *The association between social deprivation and type of learning difficulty*

There is a strong association between social deprivation and some types of learning difficulty (see Figure 5). For example, around 5% of children in the least deprived areas are identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, compared with

more than a quarter of those in the most deprived areas. Children for whom English is an additional language, who are likely to be recent arrivals in the country, also tend to live in the most deprived neighbourhoods. By way of contrast, dyslexia, hearing impairment and visual impairment appear to be identified more evenly across the social spectrum.

Figure 5: Reason for support by SIMD 2009 quintiles, as proportion of those with the same ASN, 2011



Source: data supplied by the Scottish Government in 2012

### *School exclusion and social deprivation*

As illustrated by the Edinburgh study of youth transitions and crime, there is a well-documented link between exclusion from school and progression into the criminal justice system (McAra & McVie, 2010). In Scotland, pupils may be temporarily excluded from school or, in less than 1% of cases, removed from the register. Figures



on school exclusions document a reduction in rates of exclusion since 2004 (Scottish Government, 2013). In 2004/05, the rate of exclusion was 271 per 1,000 pupils, whilst by 2012–13 exclusion rate had fallen to 18 per 1,000 pupils. In its statistical bulletin on pupils in Scotland of 2011, the Scottish Government attributes this trend to ‘the adoption of a wide range of approaches to manage behaviour and a range of provision beyond the classroom where needed for children with social, emotional and behavioural needs. Identification of behaviour issues and intervention at an early stage prevents the need for exclusions in many cases’ (Scottish Government, 2011c). However, there may be other reasons for this decrease. Dips in exclusions in 2002/03 and 2007/08 coincided with the publication of Scottish Government guidance on exclusion, strongly advising that it should be used as a very last resort. Additional requirements were placed on schools to document the processes which led up to exclusion and to institute meetings between the school and parents.

Recent reports from England (Children’s Commissioner, 2012) and from Wales (Butler, 2011) note the existence of informal or illegal exclusion from school. Recent research conducted by Harris and Riddell (2011) on dispute resolution in England and Scotland also documented the use of illegal exclusions of children with additional support needs, with parents being phoned up at work or home and requested to remove the child from school. Whilst illegal exclusion is, by its nature, under the radar, it is impossible to know to what extent the apparent drop in exclusion reflects the situation on the ground or is indicative of a growing trend towards unlawful exclusion.

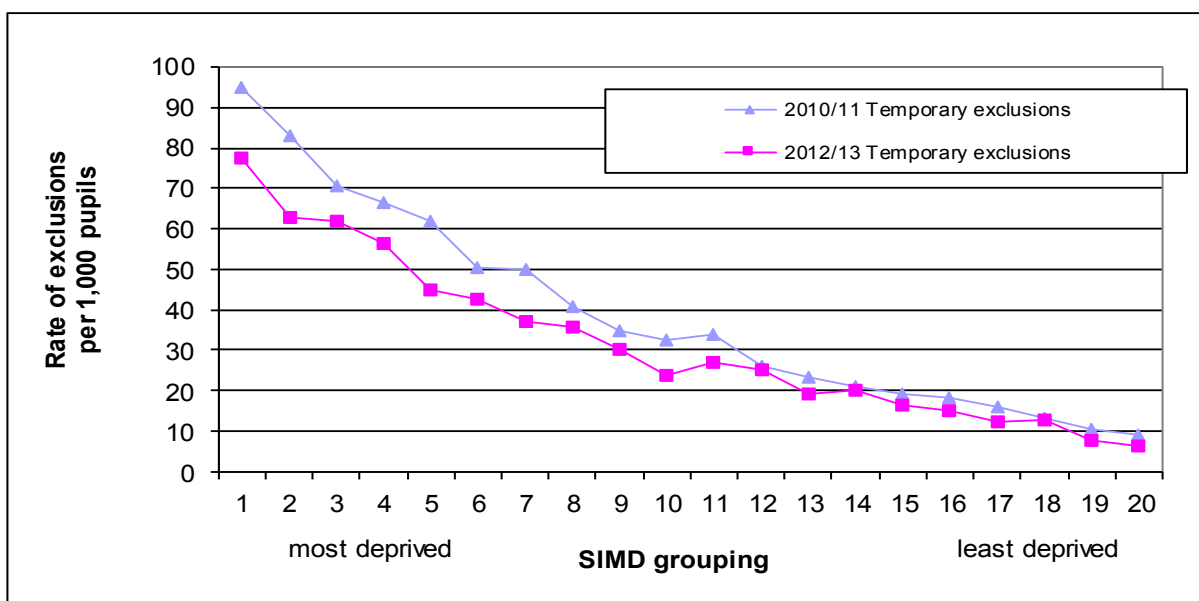
Despite the drop in the overall rate of exclusion, children with additional support needs and those living in areas of deprivation are much more likely to be excluded than others (see Table 3 and Figure 6).

Table 3: Cases of exclusion and rate per 1,000 pupils by looked after status, disability, additional support needs and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2009), by sector, 2009–2010, 2012–13

	<b>2009–10</b>		<b>2012–13</b>	
	<b>Cases of exclusions</b>	<b>Rate per 1,000 pupils</b>	<b>Cases of exclusions</b>	<b>Rate per 1,000 pupils</b>
<b>Assessed or declared disabled</b>	798	70	N/A	N/A
<b>Not assessed or declared disabled</b>	29,114	44	N/A	N/A
<b>Looked after by local authorities</b>	3,875	355	N/A	N/A
<b>Not looked after by local authorities</b>	26,336	40	N/A	N/A
<b>Pupils with Additional Support Needs</b>	7,651	174	10,539	90
<b>Pupils with no Additional Support Needs</b>	22,261	35	11,252	20
<b>Lowest 20% of SIMD (Most deprived)</b>	13,076	91	9,294	65
<b>Highest 20% of SIMD (Least deprived)</b>	1,614	12	1,270	10

Source: Scottish Government, 2011b; Scottish Government, 2013b

Figure 6: Rate of temporary exclusion per 1000 pupils by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2010–11; 2012–13



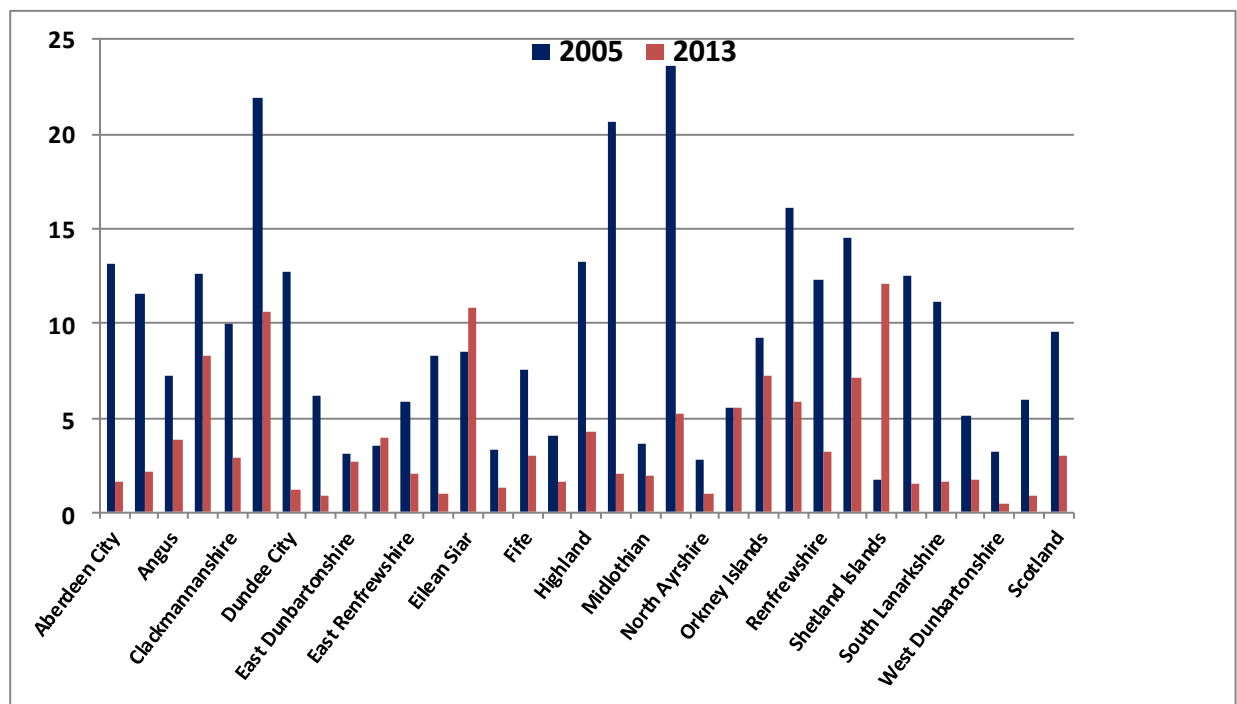
Source: Scottish Government, 2013b

### *The declining use of statutory support plans*

As noted earlier, the additional support needs legislation abolished the Record of Needs, substituting the Co-ordinated Support Plan as the statutory resource document. Complicated trade-offs between different interest groups took place during the consultation stages of the additional support needs legislation, with local authorities generally opposing statutory plans because of their reluctance to guarantee resources to individual children. Parents, by way of contrast, lobbied for the retention of some type of statutory plan, which they regarded as essential to the provision of reasonable adjustments for individual children (Riddell and Weedon, 2010). The CSP was intended to summarise the child's additional support needs and the measures proposed by education, health and social work, with a range of redress mechanisms available to parents and young people if they believed that the local authority was failing to fulfil its legal responsibilities. Since the passage of the legislation, although there has been an increase in the number of children identified as having additional support needs, there has been a decrease in the number and proportion of children with statutory support plans. In 2005, approximately 2% of the total pupil population had a Record of Needs,

whereas by 2013, only 0.5% of the population had a CSP (see Figure 7). There is also wide geographical variation, as is the case in relation to additional support needs.

Figure 7: The use of Records of Need in 2005 and Co-ordinated Support Plans in 2013 by local authority, rate per 1000 pupil population within authority.

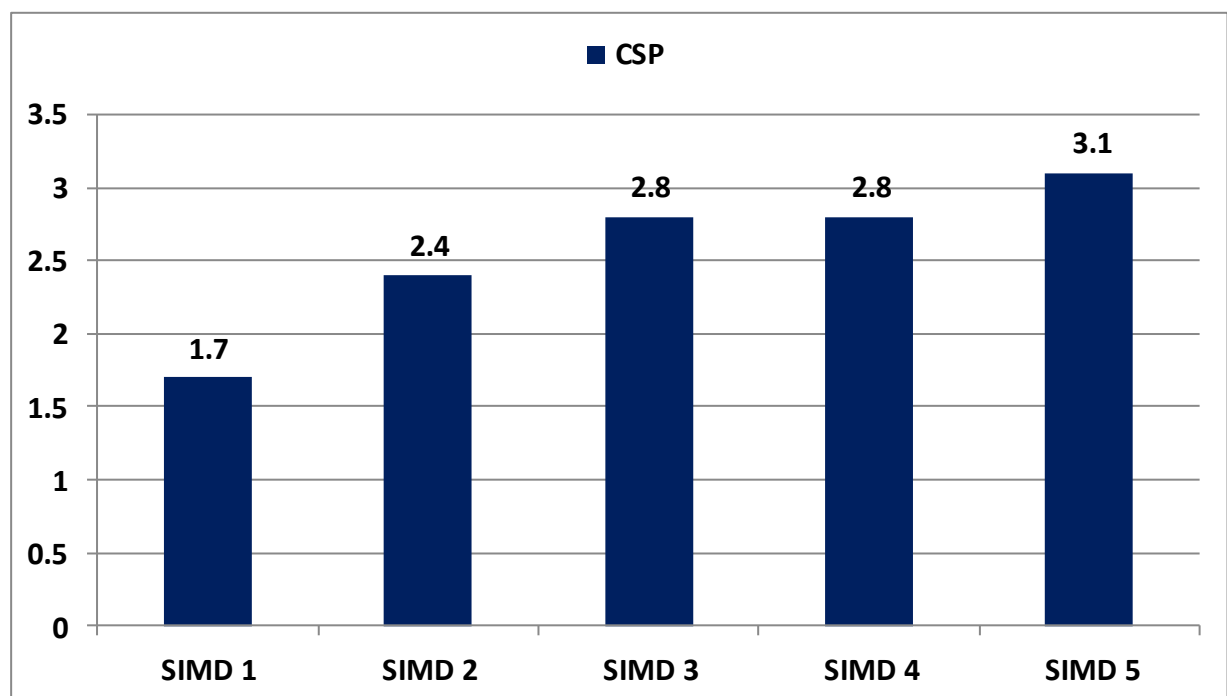


Sources: Scottish Executive, 2006; Scottish Government, 2013a

The decline in the use of statutory plans has consequences for parents and young people, since access to the tribunal is, in some cases, dependent on qualifying for a CSP (although formal disputes relating to disability discrimination and special school placing requests may be dealt with by the ASN Tribunal, irrespective of CSP status).

Although additional support needs are much more likely to be identified amongst children living in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, parents from more affluent backgrounds are more than twice as likely to obtain a statutory support plan for their child compared with those from poorer backgrounds (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of pupils with Co-ordinated Support Plans in each quintile as a percentage of all pupils with additional support needs in that quintile, by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, 2013



Source: data supplied by the Scottish Government in 2014

In the following section, we explore the way in which parents of children with additional support needs from different social class backgrounds dealt with disagreements with the local council. It should be noted that all of these parents were to some extent exceptional since they had challenged local authority decisions and had contacted the research team via voluntary organisations and advocacy groups to indicate their willingness to share their experiences. Our research on the use of dispute resolution procedures suggests that, even though a significant minority of parents are highly dissatisfied with local authorities' additional support needs provision, only a small minority make use of the formal dispute resolution routes. The majority of parents who volunteered to participate in our study were from middle class backgrounds, and therefore did not reflect the social background of children with additional support needs, the majority of whom are socially disadvantaged. Despite the middle class bias, our case

study parents crossed the social class spectrum and vividly illustrate the way in which social, cultural and economic resources influence negotiations over resource allocation.

*Case 1: Mrs. McIntosh – confident middle class*

At the time of the research, Fraser McIntosh was 15 years of age with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. His parents were professionals who worked free-lance in order to combine work and childcare. Fraser's parents had gone to great lengths to find an appropriate school for their son, and various special school placements were interspersed with home education. As Fraser became a teenager, difficulties at his special school became more apparent and his mother became convinced that school staff did not have the specialist training to manage his behaviour effectively. She researched the options independently, and eventually decided that placement in a private residential school with a therapeutic mission would best meet Fraser's needs and those of the whole family.

Mrs. McIntosh became increasingly frustrated with the situation at school, but was also aware that the council would be reluctant to concede to her placing request on grounds of cost. Having weighed up the different options, she decided on the most effective dispute resolution route to use:

I finally realized that either we had to take the city council to court and cite what we needed or else we had to find what would be the best provision we thought for Fraser that they would agree to pay for without going to court. (Mrs McIntosh)

The family made a formal placing request, and, following advice from an advocacy organization, Mrs McIntosh adopted the role of lead professional. She arranged private meetings with all thirteen professionals prior to the formal review

meeting, asking to confirm in writing that Fraser's current school could not meet his needs, and that a residential special school placement was required.

I was effectively the lead professional because I went around and organized the meetings. We had this decisive meeting that was supposed to [reach a decision] and I realised there was going to be 13 people in the room for an hour and I thought to myself, 'There's no way that we can discuss things with 13 people'. So I went round and had separate meetings with everybody so that when we came to that meeting, we were all in agreement ... So when the meeting came it was actually to make decisions because all the discussions had taken place before that. But there was nobody else who had the time or knowledge to be able to do that. So my heart really goes out to other parents who don't have that ability, that strength of character, to go out and phone up ahead and say 'Right, I need a meeting with you next Tuesday. And I want the minutes taken please'. (Mrs. McIntosh)

Following this meeting, the placing request was agreed to by the local authority, obviating the need for a formal dispute resolution process.

*Mrs Orr: insecure middle class*

Ian Orr was sixteen at the time of the research and had just completed his education at a special school in Glenside, a large rural local authority with a relatively high rate of tribunal and adjudication cases. Three cases had been brought to the Sheriff Court, on the grounds that the local authority was failing in its duty to provide 'adequate and efficient' education. Ian's parents owned their own home, but were financially tightly stretched; Mr Orr was unemployed and Mrs Orr worked for the local authority as a learning support assistant. In addition to Ian, there were two older children and a younger child who was being looked after by the family. Ian's difficulties began in the early stages of secondary school, when he was excluded from school for failing to turn up for detentions which his parents had not known about. He was subsequently excluded from school on such a regular basis that he was effectively not being educated

at all. Mrs Orr felt that the systems put in place by the school to manage Ian's behaviour were stigmatising and counter-productive. For example, if he was feeling stressed in a class, he was meant to stand up holding a red card and ask to be excused, which he regarded as humiliating:

Instead of doing that, he was getting himself stressed and he was just walking out or slamming books down, he was just getting himself deeper and deeper into trouble. (Mrs Orr).

Ian was not only excluded from school, but was also banned from school trips and the school dance, leading to increasing social isolation and stress:

I had to take him to the doctor – he was covered in eczema, he had eaten the points of his fingers, drew blood ... (Mrs Orr).

According to Mrs Orr, the school denied that Ian had additional support needs and, despite requests for assessment reports, these were never received. Although Mrs Orr would have preferred a mainstream placement, the offer of a place at a special unit for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties was accepted. In the event, Ian did very well in this structured environment and left with six Standard grades, which allowed him to start a vocational course in an FE college.

The head teacher of the special school felt that mainstream schools were consistently failing boys like Ian:

Mainstream schools cope with these young people by putting them in places like G6 or Level 19, or whatever it is. It is always given some form of anonymous name, but everyone knows what it is, a sin bin, and then they are given trips, or they are given cooking, or they are given a social worker or a youth worker. A lot of money is poured into not educating them. They are discriminated against – the council don't care about these young people. Mrs Orr was an exception to the rule,



but most of the parents are incapable of fighting for their children. (Head teacher of special school)

*Mr McDougall: Marginalised working class*

Mr McDougall was married and had five children, two of whom were identified as having additional support needs. The family lived in council accommodation in an area of socio-economic deprivation on the west side of Sea City. Mr McDougall had learning difficulties and was unable to read or write. His daughter, Marie, was 13 years old at the time of the research and had been diagnosed with dyslexia and coordination difficulties when she was seven. She was based in a special unit at the local high school, but there had been ongoing disputes about the level and location of support throughout her schooling. Mr McDougall described his difficulties in understanding the system and getting access to information:

... as a parent with learning difficulties myself, the school [second primary school]... did try to involve me ..... [but] instead of me getting letters from the school, the secretary sometimes phones me which is a good thing, right, but it doesn't always happen, so it's totally random so to speak, and depending how busy the secretary is, and if she can fit me in, or that's the way it felt. But I have to rely on letters from the school, and it's not very good for when I can't read and write myself, and I find that hugely complicated. (Mr McDougall)

In order to secure what he regarded as a suitable education for his daughter, Mr McDougall felt that he had to constantly challenge the system:

I had to fight for that, or she would have never have got into the base. If I had just been a quiet person that didn't know enough about the education system, to either moan or speak to the council or whatever the case might be, she would have never got into the base. (Mr McDougall)

He was particularly upset that no audio information was available in relation to the additional support needs legislation, leaving him at a severe disadvantage:

Three and a half years ago, when the additional support for learning had just come out, they were just publicising the documents, I was told I had to wait six months, I repeat, six months on a taped copy of the additional support for learning. They never had any ready, that was discrimination to a maximum degree. When they had the written version ready they should have automatically had taped versions ready. They are legally bound, just as well as everybody else is, and even more so. I was told I had to wait six months, by that time my case was gone and heard. (Mr McDougall)

Mr McDougall was confused about the different dispute resolution routes available, and clearly would have required considerable support to have used them effectively.

To summarise, the vignettes presented above illustrate the complexities of negotiating additional resources for children with additional support needs, which are strongly dependent on parents' social, economic and cultural resources. New dispute resolution routes implemented under the 2004 additional support needs legislation were intended to boost parents' rights and undoubtedly have enabled some parents to challenge local authority decisions. Nonetheless, parents from disadvantaged backgrounds lack the social, cultural and economic resources to ensure that they are able to challenge local authority and school decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past decade and a half, there has been a focus in Scotland on reducing social class differences in attainment including children with additional support needs in mainstream education.

The most striking feature of the Scottish additional support needs system over recent years has been its exponential growth, particularly in categories where working class boys are disproportionately identified. Since the passage of the additional support for learning legislation in 2004, official statistics show a quadrupling of children identified as having additional support needs. This has been achieved by widening the definition of which children are counted, so that now children with any type of additional need are included in the statistics. At the same time as the number of pupils with additional support needs has expanded, the proportion of those with a statutory support plan has diminished. This is significant because a statutory support plan provides some guarantee of additional resources and stronger rights of redress. Whilst there has been a major expansion of the additional support needs population, the extent to which these children are actually receiving additional resources is uncertain. The vignettes presented above illustrate the social class inequalities which enable middle class parents to use their social, economic and cultural capital to maximise their allocation of education resources. By way of contrast, those from less advantaged backgrounds, including those who themselves have learning difficulties, struggle to understand the complex legal system which has been put in place.

Scottish policy makers believe that the expansion of the additional support needs system is to be welcomed because it indicates that more children are having their needs met. However, it is important to apply a critical lens to this expansion. As discussed earlier in this paper, Tomlinson (1985) suggested that, in the 1980s the expansion of the category of special educational needs was used to obscure underlying economic problems contributing to a collapse in the youth labour market. The identification of growing numbers of children with learning deficits, particularly clustered into the non-normative and highly stigmatised category of social, emotional and behavioural

difficulties, may be used as an explanation and justification for their lack of employment. This may be a useful deflection of attention from the main source of the problem, which is the collapse of the youth labour market across Europe in the wake of the on-going crisis of capitalism.

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